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# SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIANITY IN MODERN ASIA. I

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*This is the first of a series of articles by Professor Henderson containing his estimate of the progress of Christianity in India, Burmah, China, and Japan. Professor Henderson has just returned from a visit of several months in Asia whither he went as lecturer upon the Barrows Foundation of the University of Chicago. Professor Henderson, in addition to being an active Christian worker, has won highest recognition as a sociologist. He is the American member of the International Prison Commission, President of the United Charities of Chicago, and has served as president or secretary of many commissions and national conferences on social matters. His opinions are therefore those of a trained observer, and are of special value for all those interested in the progress of foreign missions.*

Modern Asia comprises chiefly three very different peoples, those of India, China, and Japan, and in India itself we have a continent with many different peoples without nationality. Therefore, we must be careful to indicate how far our generalizations apply, when the facts are so varied and conflicting.

It is possible to exaggerate the differences and underrate the common human factors, and so a good starting-point is the common need of mankind. The needs of human beings are so many that each person will catalogue them in his own way. It is easy to begin with the universal, primitive, and insistent desires for food, shelter, and bodily comfort, which men share with their humble relations in the animal world. In all cities and villages the vendors of grain, meal, milk, and condiments may be seen plying their calling, carpenters constructing houses, gardeners

bringing their vegetables to market or hawking them in the street.

These elementary demands are at the roots of all industries, barter, trade, and commerce. Therefore, in all lands we find at least the rudimentary forms of manufacture and business. In modern Asia many branches of the crafts have been carried to artistic finish, with the help of ancient traditions of designs and process.

Out of the crafts naturally arise the arts of construction, shaping, coloring, imaginative reproduction of living forms. The street of an Indian village glows with the colors of the simple garments; in Canton the descendants of ancient silk-weavers sit at their looms; in Kyoto there are common workmen who will not put their names on a vase which has the slightest defect, though one which a layman would not notice.

In all countries the peoples have built

up agencies and sentiments of control, of common action and co-operation: moral codes, customs which grip like steel traps, divine sanctions, police, courts, punishments, prisons. The need of harmonizing relations, of making the common interest dominate impulse, passion, selfishness, has been felt everywhere.

Nor has the divine been forgotten. The coarse, to us repulsive, idols and rites of Madura, the hideous monsters of temples in China and Japan, the superstitions which fill the forest and the cave with goblins and demons, the reverent and affectionate ceremonies of ancestor-worship in all the Orient, will not shock us overmuch when we understand their origin and their significance. Even before we attempt to teach and correct, it is our duty to understand.

Thus in our desire to live, to avoid pain, to enjoy companionship with our kind, to add graceful decoration to plain utilities, to tame conduct to serve the common welfare, to know the laws of life, to discover the will of God, and to worship, we men are everywhere one. We can understand each other. Differences of color, speech, temperament, race, are doubtless important; but fraternity is deeper and more full of meaning; the desires of humanity make us kin; the longing for God, the yearning for life beyond life, is deeper than the surface waves of the world's deep and shoreless being. Under skins black, brown, yellow, or white, the blood is always red.

It is because the Christian world is fully and clearly conscious of this universal need that it is significant for modern Asia. It is true that we have learned our lesson imperfectly ourselves;

true that we have not been willing to be wholly logical in our conduct; that we feel in our old Adam the fierce feuds of division and discordant inherited instincts; that we cannot help finding contact with greasy and noisome honesty more disagreeable than social intercourse with well-dressed knavery. We are inconsistent even when we are not hypocritical. But when we read our gospel we feel shame. We are at least inclined to wash a spot on the street gamin's cheek that we may kiss it. Our refined daughters discover that a bloody and disgusting surgical operation which rescues a life is beautiful. We are on our way to brotherhood. We give even ignorance a vote, and we hope to cure ignorance with our public schools. We preach the fatherhood of God and universal redemption for man, and try to believe it even when sorely tempted to think the devil is father of most we see.

We shut up all men in the guilt of sin, that we may have a rag of mercy for ourselves. We accept a democracy of evil that we may have a rational foundation for a republic of God. Since no man has a private revelation of salvation, he must find his hope in a new world's book of mercy, or go on his lonely way of despair, or of conceit and self-righteousness which is darker than despair.

It is in its estimate of the value of human life that Christianity has significance for modern Asia, especially for India and Buddhistic Burmah. There is no outlook for nationalistic and patriotic ambitions in a land of caste, where the life of a pariah has no respect. A nation, said Lincoln, cannot exist half slave and half free. So long as it is a mark of social distinction to leave

a fellow-citizen of low rank to the dogs, citizenship is sham. A nation cannot be built on sham. The most hopeful fact about recent discussions of patriotism in India is that these hard facts are partly recognized. We must not be surprised if inveterate traditions, like all habits, are slow to change. The inertia of custom cannot be ignored. Meantime Christianity is turning the furrows, crushing clods, preparing the soil, and sowing the seeds of good citizenship, the doctrine of brotherhood.

Many of the tumultuous critics of theology are off the track. They vociferate denunciations of "dogmas" and "doctrines" and call for life, action, reforms, works, service, and many other good things. What they mean, when they mean anything, is that they are weary of false doctrines, of dead theology, of superstition, of unverifiable dogmas insignificant for duty and practice. Surely no competent person can affirm that we do not need truth, something to teach. Truth about man, sin, duty, God, redemption, and immortality, when clearly stated and related to life, is our sole reliance. The theological ideas of Jesus are the chief need of mankind. We cannot discover an anthropological or physiological basis for human brotherhood; we must have a theological foundation; our heredity may not be from any one Adam, but it is certainly from God. The world conceived as a vast orphan asylum is not on the way of progress. "I will not leave you orphans" is the word of the Son of God.

The agnostic will sincerely object. We cannot help that; we must act on our own convictions, not on his lack of

belief; and we simply inquire, with no touch of scorn, how agnosticism is going to work. It has not yet shown what it can do; Christianity has shown what it can do; and its feeble beginnings have in all ages been prophecies of ultimate triumphs.

But Christianity is more than a statement of ideas about God's fatherhood and human brotherhood. Historically, actually where Christianity goes it travels incarnate in its believers. Every educated missionary embodies in himself the accumulated culture of Christendom, and takes it with him. He sets up a civilized home, treats his wife and children in a civilized way, calls in a civilized physician, depends not on magic but on science, fights the causes of diseases, shows by his conduct that he loves to live and wants others to live. He will not beat or starve a cur or a cow, nor will he abandon a loathsome outcast to his fate. He gives the lie to pessimism and nihilism by his passionate love of life, his calm and reasonable mode of preserving it. In a land where fate and foreordination are supposed to fix one's earthly doom, he relies on invention, organized effort, brave combat for existence. Facing the belief that our conduct in some previous state of existence determines our condition here, the ambassador of Christendom affirms the causal efficiency of hygienic conduct, of medicine, of surgery. He institutionalizes his belief and his optimism. The effect of course is not instantaneous. Traditions of "karma" and Moslem predestination have deep roots in antiquity, in holy associations, in popular customs, in manners, in habit. False beliefs are not smitten to the

ground by mighty arguments; they slowly and insensibly dissolve in a new atmosphere of experience, sociability, and reflection. India will never know when it passes over to the Christian view of the world. History will record no date for it. Many a defender of the ancient creed will unconsciously promote the new ideas under old forms, and put into his sacred texts modern conceptions. In this he will not always be a hypocrite; he will not himself be aware how far he has changed his real beliefs. What has transformed his most vital and regnant convictions is not a bare idea but a new fact. It is an assertion in deeds and institutions of the worthfulness of life. This is more significant of the real genius of Christianity than the cross; for the cross symbolizes only that part of Christianity which means suffering, defeat, and sacrifice; the ascended Christ, the triumphant Christ, has yet no popular symbol. Gradually the saving and progressive agencies which embody the life of Christ in deed and triumph will furnish the symbols of the faith in "Christ who is our life."

The dead hand of pessimism and nihilism falls upon human hope for the future as well as upon present existence. In Hinduism and in Buddhism the symbol of the future is a burnt-out candle, the flame flickering in its socket, obscured in a cloud of smoke. In Christianity the future is a garden of flowers, a city with golden pavements, a companionship in ministry and progress, all souls borne onward by "the power of an endless life." This hope reflects its glory backward upon the meaning of this earthly life. Tenny-

son's appeal is ever unanswerable: we cannot work as well for worm and fly as we can for immortal man. Weakening of this hope is degradation of the value of this earthly career. Christian hope of immortality is not based on selfishness, but on a call to duty yet unfulfilled, of work to be done. One might humbly submit to annihilation for himself, if the good God or Nature wills it so; but can he accept the extinction of the whole race without a moral fall from heaven's heights to lowest and darkest abysses? Christianity, both by doctrine and deed, affirming the dignity and the endless future of each human person, makes progress in India possible. If the path of man is to be regarded as a path through inevitable misery to extinction of personality, the central and mightiest forces of European civilization cannot be communicated to India.

When we come to China we arrive at a new problem. Going from ascetic, vegetarian India to Canton, one of the first impressions is that we are in a land of good eaters. Whatever he may find out about belief in a future life, the Chinese man is fully convinced that it is worth while to make all he can of this earth. Professor F. H. King, in his marvelous recital of *Farmers of Forty Centuries*, has set before us with photographic fidelity and scientific accuracy the amazing and well-directed energy and industry of the people of China and Japan. To an American, exploiter by instinct, the productivity of an acre in China or Japan is incredible. A sober statistical statement reads to us like a fairy story. Aladdin's lamp is nothing to Chinese industry and invention. China is in love with life and

needs no exhortation to cling to existence and fight for elbow room. How they achieve their success, and at what tragic cost, may be read in the glowing pages of Professor E. A. Ross's *Changing Chinese*.

What China needs is not exhortation but the guidance of science and the inspiration of ethical spirituality. Science should not be carried to China by those who have not also the inspiration of ethical spirituality. Agnosticism, aside from casual publications and polemical criticism of missionaries, has not gone to much trouble or cost to shed the light of science in China. The missionaries have done that. Science is part and parcel of the gospel we are preaching. Lectures on the gyroscope and the aeroplane ring the bell for men to come to church.

We must confess that some missionaries, unfortunately, have neither knowledge nor appreciation of science. Either their education was neglected altogether, or they studied language and literature and forgot God's other works and ways. They are suspicious, troubled, keen on the scent for heresy, and likely to find it, even where it does not exist. These obscurantists are often pious men, self-denying, devoted, humane; but they get in the way; they make the most intelligent Chinese skeptical; they hinder the intellectual dominance of Christianity. It is a pity to send out more men of this type. But Christianity will live in spite of them; and their good qualities will do good even when their fear of progress has done harm.

The men who are to steer the ship in the torrents and cross-currents of the

present turbulent crisis in China will have no easy task. The leaders of China are astute, vigorous, determined, many of them persons of eminent talent. They have a literature and traditions of morals and politics. They are independent and self-confident, though just now somewhat less arrogant by reason of certain revelations of their naval and military inferiority. Some of their students in Europe and America have achieved conspicuous success in spite of the handicap of foreign language as a medium of study. Those who set up as guides for such men must not be weaklings. The young men who are now crowding into our Christian colleges must not be taught there to identify intellectual stagnation and incompetence with the Christian faith. We must build a few strong, well-endowed, well-manned institutions of education in great centers rather than dozens of feeble and contemptible schools competing with each other for the limited, available funds of the Christian world.

If we do our full duty the intellect of the next generation of Chinese people will be Christian. The government is alert, is watching us with some degree of suspicion, and will detect us if we attempt to lead them into the fogs of mediaevalism. We are on trial as never before, and it is our supreme opportunity. A blunder now cannot be repaired in generations to come.

Even in medical missions the chief significance of the Christian movement does not lie in their humanity and healing ministry, but in their scientific and educational service. They are beautiful examples of Christian devo-

tion; they do show forth by demonstration the tender mercy of our God; they thus reveal the redemptive compassion of our religion. But their permanent contribution to Chinese life will be the establishment of centers of scientific study and teaching. Pity and mercy toward frailty, misery, and sin are not the last word of Christianity; eternal life includes also the gladness of God that he ever made man, and his satisfaction in the progress of his children. If Christianity had nothing but its negative salvation from sin, it would have no virile message for a sturdy, sensible, and ambitious people like the Chinese. The ascetic and inhibitive aspect of Christianity is not the whole story, or its significance would soon be lost. It is necessary to have conviction for sin; but such conviction remains shallow and hollow while the ideal of development is low and easily satisfied.

The modern Asia we find in Japan is still a third world, in which the universal and elemental needs of humanity exist, indeed, but in other forms than those of China and India. The Empire of the Rising Sun first borrowed its

seed of civilization from India and China; but that was ages ago. In our day Japan blows the trumpet which wakes the ancient East to new life. How long Japan will continue to be political leader of the Orient the future, silent now, must take its own time to disclose. But at present its leadership is beyond question.

Unfortunately its young men in breaking with the old creeds are adrift, as always in a period of revolution. Many good faiths have gone down in this spiritual wreck. But there are signs of inquiry and seriousness. A strong and liberal religious teacher can get a hearing of students in the most skeptical locality; but he must not talk rubbish, for in these matters young fellows have their eyes open. They have not discarded their own mediaevalism to imitate ours. A modern Christianity alone can win a respectful audience among the inquiring youth of Tokyo or Kyoto universities.

The message may be and should be positive, for personal conviction counts anywhere with young men; but it must not be sectarian, unethical, isolated from the hunger and urgency of life.